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Secret Police at the Olympics

Communist countries won most of the gold medals at the 1976 Olympics. In an earlier column, we told how they did it. They train athletes from childhood to become Olympic stars.

We charged that most Communist countries subsidize their athletes, providing special luxuries for those who perform best. The training and indoctrination is so intensive that the sport becomes their main occupation. Thus the Communist regimes send professional athletes to the Olympics to compete against amateurs from other lands.

This doesn't seem to trouble the Olympics authorities, who actually enforce the double standard. Any American athlete who accepts a subsidy, for example, is classified as a professional and is barred from the games.

Not only the athletes but the secret police are trained for the Olympics in the Communist world. Confidential intelligence sources indicate that the training is every bit as rigorous for the gumshoes as for the performers.

In Russia, the Olympics security forces are drawn from both the First chief Directorate and the Second chief Directorate of the dreaded KGB. The First Directorate corresponds roughly to the Central Intelligency Agency. Its principal duty was to check out anti-Soviet elements, such as the Ukrainian separatists and the Jewish Defense League, who might try to harm the Soviet athletes.

But the Olmypics also provided the KGB with ane excellent cover for espionage sessions in Montreal. Top agents of the First Directorate were able to enter the country, no questions asked, as part of the Soviet Olympics delegation. The games also made it easy for agents throughout North America to travel to Montreal. They were able to move unnoticed in the crowds.

While the athletes competed in the stadium, the agents compared notes in the backrooms. One source described the occasion as sort of an "old home week" for spies.

The Second Directorate, whose functions are somewhat similar to those of the FBI, was responsible for preventing defections. For months before the Olympics, according to reliable intelligence, the faceless men of the Second Directorate sifted through the records of the Soviet athletes.

Those who drank too much or who had a weakness for strange women were either eliminated or placed under special watch. Past statements of the athletes were checked for any hint of antagonism against the regeme. A network of informers was developed within the Olympic delegation to report on the athletes

The agents themselves infiltrated the delegation. Intelligence source estimate that at least one and often two KGB agents accompanied every Soviet sporting team. At a previous Olympics, FBI and CIA specialists spotted seven middle-level KGB agents posing as delegation members.

The agents actually accompanied their charges on shopping trips, sightseeing tours and dinner engagements at restaurants outside Olympic Village. The agents also mingled with their athletes when they met socially with performers from other countries. The effect was a disconcerting sameness in the conversations of Communist athletes.

As a result of the strict surveillance, only a 17-year-old diver, Sergei Nemtsanov, defected.

The only other goof was the discovery that Boris Onischenko, a Soviet fencing master, used an elctronic device to cheat in his epee match. When he triggered a button in the sword's grip, it scored a hit for him.

Veteran intelligence sources report that Onischenko was considered to be "close" to the Soviet Interior ministry. They speculate that the KGB may actually have rigged him up to win a gold medal. The electronic apparatus was far more sophisticated, for example, than a fencing master likely could have devised. Indeed, the fact that he was caught indicates he didn't understand the sophisticated equipment he was using.

The same basic security system is used by most of the bloc nations to keep their athletes in line. Each athlete before leaving his Communist homeland is briefed on how to respond to sensitive questions. A former Cuban gymnastic star, Zulema Bregado Gutierrez, testified about this in the early 1970s.

"We are trained to answer the questions we might be asked about Cuba," she told the Senate Internal Security subcommittee. "We get a special session on that particular country, on the political situation in that particular country . . . We don't believe everything they tell us about that particular country, but that's the way they prepare us."